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ABSTRACT

Research in the Cincinnati public schools indicates that parent involvement in schools can have a major positive impact on education. Specifically, studies have shown that (1) parent involvement can help improve academic achievement and behavior and increase student attendance, (2) parents want to be involved in school, (3) schools need to be flexible in defining parent participation, (4) schools need to take the initiative in establishing communication and participation, (5) involvement needs to be extended into the community, and (6) nonparents should also be involved. (BJD)

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REMARKS

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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I AM GOING TO LIMIT MY REMARKS TODAY TO AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT I CONSIDER THE SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH FINDINGS THAT RELATE TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS. I SHOULD ADD PARENTHETICALLY THAT THE FINDINGS THAT I WILL RECITE ARE SUBSTANTIALLY CORROBORATED IN THE RESEARCH THAT WE HAVE DONE IN THE CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THROUGH MY OWN PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS.

THE FIRST GENERAL FINDING IS THAT PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS CAN MAKE A MAJOR POSITIVE DIFFERENCE. RESEARCH HAS SHOWN PARENT INVOLVEMENT TO BE SIGNIFICANTLY RELATED TO IMPROVED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, IMPROVED SCHOOL BEHAVIOR, AND INCREASED STUDENT ATTENDANCE. THOSE ARE THE MAJOR PLUSSES AS FAR AS STUDENTS ARE CONCERNED. ADDITIONAL BENEFITS, HOWEVER, FROM PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS INCLUDE INCREASED COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS AND INCREASED RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR SCHOOLING INCLUDING HUMAN, FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL.

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SECOND, RESEARCH INDICATES THAT PARENTS WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN SCHOOL; THEY FEEL EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT AND THEY WANT TO STAY INFORMED OF THEIR CHILD'S PROGRESS IN SCHOOL. LET ME ADD A PERSONAL OBSERVATION THAT PARENTS WANT DESPERATELY TO FEEL PRIDE IN THE SCHOOL THEIR CHILD ATTENDS. UNFORTUNATELY, MANY PARENTS FEEL THAT THAT SENSE OF PRIDE CAN COME ONLY FROM RECEIVING MEDIA ATTENTION. I AM OFTEN DUMBFOUNDED BY THE EXTENT TO WHICH NEWSPAPER, TELEVISION, RADIO, OR OTHER KINDS OF PUBLICITY ARE USED AS THE MAJOR CRITERIA IN DETERMINING A SCHOOL'S EFFECTIVENESS RATHER THAN THROUGH DIRECT KNOWLEDGE AND INDEPENDENT JUDGMENT.

THIRD, SCHOOLS NEED TO BE FLEXIBLE IN DEFINING PARENT PARTICIPATION. THERE ARE MANY WAYS PARENTS CAN BE INVOLVED; NOT EVERYTHING IS APPROPRIATE FOR EVERY PARENT. MOST PARENTS ARE INTERESTED IN THOSE THINGS WHICH AFFECT THEIR OWN CHILD. CONSEQUENTLY, THE TYPES OF PARTICIPATION THAT DO NOT DIRECTLY AFFECT A PARENT'S OWN CHILD, SUCH AS SCHOOL GOVERNESS OR ADVISORY BOARD PARTICIPATION, PROBABLY HAVE LESS ATTRACTION TO MOST PARENTS. INVOLVEMENT MAY MEAN LITTLE DIRECT PARTICIPATION; FOR EXAMPLE, RECEIVING COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SCHOOL OR THE TEACHER, OR ONLY COMING TO THE SCHOOL

BUILDING WHEN ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. HOWEVER, PARENTS MAY BE VERY ACTIVELY INVOLVED AS TUTORS, VOLUNTEER TYPISTS, LUNCHROOM MONITORS, ETC. MEMBERSHIP IN THE PTA, BOOSTERS, OR SPECIAL FUND-RAISING GROUPS FOR FACILITY IMPROVEMENT IS YET ANOTHER TYPE OF PARTICIPATION. PARENTS-AS-TEACHERS IS A POPULAR CONCEPT, ESPECIALLY IN PRESCHOOL AND THE EARLY ELEMENTARY YEARS, THUS MEANING DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS. IN GENERAL, THE FARTHER AWAY PARENT INVOLVEMENT IS FROM THEIR OWN CHILD, THE LESS LIKELIHOOD THERE IS OF PARTICIPATION. THUS, INVOLVEMENT IS MOST LIKELY WHEN A PARENT'S OWN CHILD IS AT STAKE; LESS LIKELY WHEN THE PARTICIPATION IS AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL; EVEN LESS AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL; AND LEAST AT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVEL.

FOURTH, SCHOOLS NEED TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN ESTABLISHING VEHICLES OF COMMUNICATION AND IN INVITING PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT. WHEN TEACHERS MAKE MORE FREQUENT CONTACT WITH PARENTS, PARENTS TEND TO MAKE MORE FREQUENT CONTACT WITH TEACHERS. EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND FAMILY IS ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASES IN THE NUMBER OF PARENT-INITIATED CONTACTS WITH THE SCHOOL. SCHOOLS DO HAVE ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION PARENTS ARE MOST INTERESTED IN, SUCH AS: ACADEMIC PROGRESS,

BEHAVIOR DIFFICULTIES, AND SO ON, AND SHOULD BE THE SOURCES USED TO KEEP PARENTS INFORMED ROUTINELY.

IN CINCINNATI, IT IS SCHOOL BOARD POLICY FOR EACH SCHOOL TO HAVE A LOCAL SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL CONSISTING OF ONE-THIRD STAFF, ONE-THIRD PARENTS, AND ONE-THIRD COMMUNITY AT LARGE. THESE LOCAL SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILS HAVE AT THEIR DISPOSAL A VAST ARRAY OF INFORMATION CONCERNING THEIR SCHOOLS SO THAT APPROPRIATE PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION, NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND GOAL-SETTING ACTIVITIES CAN OCCUR EACH YEAR.

FIFTH, INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS NEEDS TO EXTEND BEYOND PARENTS AND INTO THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE. ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS THAT VALIDATES THIS STATEMENT IS THE SIMPLE FACT THAT LESS THAN 20 PERCENT OF THE VOTING POPULATION WILL BE PARENTS BY 1985. IT IS ALMOST AXIOMATIC THAT THE LESS THE VOTERS KNOW ABOUT THEIR SCHOOLS THE LESS LIKELIHOOD THERE IS OF THOSE PERSONS VOTING FOR THEIR SCHOOLS. VOTERS WHO RECEIVE SOME FORM OF COMMUNICATION FROM SCHOOLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE AND TO VOTE FAVORABLY ON SCHOOL-RELATED ISSUES. IDEALLY, OF COURSE, NON-PARENTS SHOULD COME IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH SCHOOLS IN WHATEVER FORM POSSIBLE BECAUSE, THE MORE DIRECT CONTACT ONE HAS WITH THE SCHOOL, THE MORE LIKELY THERE WILL BE SUPPORT FOR THAT SCHOOL. ONE STUDY

FOUND THAT TWO OUT OF THREE ADULTS HAVE NO CONTACT WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUT, NEVERTHELESS, WANT TO BE INFORMED OF THINGS LIKE CURRICULUM, BUDGET, DISCIPLINE, ETC. BASED ON WHAT I HAVE JUST SAID, IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE THAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN FACED WITH DECREASING COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND PUBLIC CONFIDENCE I AM NOT AT ALL SURE THAT THIS DECREASE IN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IS ANY WORSE THAN IN OTHER OF SOCIETY'S MAJOR INSTITUTIONS, SUCH AS THE GOVERNMENT, THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM, THE MASS MEDIA, AND, YES, EVEN THE CHURCH.

IT IS INCUMBENT UPON US EDUCATORS TO INVOLVE THE NON-PARENT SECTOR IN AS MANY WAYS AS POSSIBLE. THERE ARE MANY METHODS OF BRINGING THIS GROUP INTO CONTACT WITH THEIR SCHOOL: SCHOOL/BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS, SENIOR-CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT, JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT, USE OF MASS MEDIA, NEWSLETTERS TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS (AT LEAST OPINION LEADERS), COMMUNITY EDUCATION, AND RECREATION PROGRAMS. I THINK THE KEY WORD HERE IS "OWNERSHIP." WE MUST CONVEY TO ALL MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY A SENSE THAT THEY HAVE A PIECE OF THE ACTION AND THAT THE QUALITY OF SCHOOLING DEPENDS ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY ARE WILLING TO CHIP IN AND HELP MAKE A BETTER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.

FINALLY, I WOULD POINT OUT THAT I HAVE NEVER SEEN A SCHOOL THAT HAS A HIGH LEVEL OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT WITHOUT ALSO SEEING ABOVE-AVERAGE LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT, DEPORTMENT AND ATTENDANCE. THIS IS NOT TO SAY DEFINITIVELY THAT PARENT INVOLVEMENT NECESSARILY CAUSES THESE THINGS TO HAPPEN BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO DETERMINE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS. YET THE STRONG CORRELATION CERTAINLY SUGGEST THAT IF WE WANT STRONG SCHOOLS, PRIDE IN AND SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION, WE NEED TO INVOLVE AS MANY CITIZENS OF OUR COMMUNITY AS POSSIBLE IN THIS MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL ENTERPRISES.

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